

Not So Fireproof on the Outside

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Summary: A Hiccup becomes unhinged while a perfectly reasonably Toothless watches on.

1. Chapter 1

Day 0.5

****Astrid****

It was a beautiful day, Astrid thought to herself. Nothing beat a long day spent working in the quarry digging out boulders than enjoying a perfect spring afternoon chowing down on awesome food and spending quality time with her closest friends, but she could not shake the feeling that something was not quite right.

Hiccup was distracted and not really listening to her as he was too busy half stuffing his face and half focusing on Toothless. It was also lunchtime for their dragons but Toothless was not eating, Astrid noticed as she watched from her seat under a tree and wondered if he was feeling okay. Stormfly was there as well, swooping in and out of the river, emerging with a yummy fat salmon clutched between her teeth every time, but her buddy Toothless wasn't interested in any of that. The Night Fury just sat there crouched in the long grasses growing along the banks of the river completely disinterested in joining the Nadder in her hunt.

"Is Toothless feeling okay?" She asked her date, who was in the middle of a yummy meal himself. He was sitting across from her devouring a slice of the quiche she had prepared for them.

Hiccup looked up at her. "Couldn't be better." He said, his words muffled by his full mouth. "What's this again?" He asked.

Astrid smiled. "Grandma's Cheesequichecake." She said, beaming with pride. "A delicate dance of the sweet and the savory. A quiche with a

cheesecake swirled in " it's a complete meal in a compact little package!"

"Mmmm's good." Hiccup said, and took another bite of the cake with much gusto. "Did your grandma teach you how to make it?"

"Oh, no. I came up with the recipe myself. I call it that so I have something to pass down to my grand kids." She explained and watched as Hiccup opened his jaw as wiiiiide as possible and even then, his mouth was barely big enough to contain the rest of the cake into which he was currently stuffing. Astrid raised an eyebrow. Though she was flattered that her recipe had gotten such a positive reception, nobody could stuff half a slice of a cake as dense as that into one bite! It was physically impossible! She watched nervously as he worked the food jam packed in his mouth and swallowed it down. She had her Kiss of Life with her so he would be okay even if he did choke. A well placed jab with the butt of her ax would dislodge any obstruction. But still...

Hiccup stood up and wiped his hands on his thighs. "That was delicious. Thanks, Astrid."

Her worry dissipated with the compliment. She beamed brightly. "Anytime. Hey, we should do this next week too! I have something else I'm working on..." She trailed off when it became evident that she was no longer speaking to anyone. Hiccup was half-running, half-tripping down the hill heading towards the riverbank where their dragons were working on their lunch. "...something else." She mumbled to nobody in particular. How Rude!

Under any other circumstance, she would have totally reamed him out for doing that, but it was so out of character for Hiccup blow her off like that, so she was more stunned than angry over what had just happened. But still...

Oh, she would have a talk with him, all right. Astrid cursed under her breath, pulled out the whetstone from the purse and began to sharpen her blade. Her mood ruined, she watched Stormfly. At least Astrid could count on her to not be rude and disappoint her. The dragon was downstream some 15 yards away and acting totally cute. She had finished with her meal by then, and was splashing around in the icy waters, terrorizing the fish that had survived to be fed upon another day.

Toothless still had not yet moved from his spot in the tall grass. He remained completely still and wanted nothing to do with Stormfly or Hiccup or any of them. Astrid's anger turned to worry. Something was seriously wrong with the dragon. She understood then. Hiccup had to have sensed it as well, she thought. Despite reassuring her that Toothless was fine, he had to have known that his buddy wasn't feeling well. He was probably hiding it so that she wouldn't worry. That's why he's been acting so weird and distracted today, she thought.

Stormfly squawked at Hiccup, and Astrid watched as her dragon snatched a fish out of the river and tossed it over to Hiccup. The boy and the Nadder were trying to help Toothless eat since he was not feeding himself, she realized. Toothless nibbled hesitantly at the fish that was placed before him and then roasted it with a fire bolt before eating it. That was odd, she thought. Since when did Toothless

cook his food before he ate it? Astrid wondered. She had never seen any of the dragons back in the village do that.

Hiccup did not seem to be concerned, or if he was, he didn't show it. If he thought Toothless cooking his meal was no big deal then maybe it wasn't... Stormfly had plucked another fish out of the river and again had lobbed it over to Hiccup. Astrid watched, incredulous, as her boyfriend lifted the still wiggly fresh catch to his mouth and tore off a chunk with his teeth before offering the rest to his ailing dragon.

Okay. What?

"Hiccup!" She called out. He did not seem to hear her, as he continued to see to Toothless.

"HEY~~~ HICUUUP!" She called out again, louder. Again, Hiccup made no sign to suggest that he heard her. But Toothless did. She noticed the dragon prick up his ears and poked Hiccup in the side with his snout. He looked up at her and waved, signaling that she had his attention.

"Come here, I need to ask you something!" She beckoned him over. He didn't move at first, he just stood there and looked at her like he was wondering if she was even worth his time, but then Toothless jabbed him in the back more forcefully that time so he acquiesced. _Good boy_. She thought to herself. She would have to make him a snack for later. Toothless was not the only one not right today, she thought. If only she could get Hiccup to tell her what was going on.

"Hey Astrid." He said. "What's up?"

She studied his face for a moment. "Hiccup, are you feeling okay?" She asked.

He shrugged. "Hive never felt better. Why do you ask?"

_Hive? _She shook her head. "No reason."

****The Downed Dragons****

The boy waited at the front door of his house and watched as the girl and Stormfly headed off. "That was close." He said to the dragon sitting at his side. "You need to be more careful, Buddy. You almost blew our cover back there."

The dragon responded by snorting and snapping his jaw.

"Oh come on, you know there was a perfectly good explanation for that. You weren't eating right so I had to show you how it was done." The dragon said nothing. He knew that the boy was right about that, even if he was not happy about it.

"I'm sorry, Buddy, but we really do need to be careful. This is only temporary and nobody can do anything about it, so it's best not to impose and cause a giant freak out over nothing."

The dragon padded off to his roost. "Hmm, not feeling very sociable tonight, are you? Well, I can't say I blame you." The boy turned to

enter his house.

"Two more days of this, Kiddo. Only two more."

2. Chapter 2

Day 1

****The Chief**
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Stoick came home to find his son sitting in front of the fireplace hunched over with his nose buried deep in a book. That wasn't so unusual by itself, nor was the presence of the large black dragon sitting at his side, listening raptly as Hiccup slowly and carefully pronounced every syllable of every word that he read out loud. And the fact that the book that had held the attention of boy and dragon was the book of beginning runes that he had used to teach the boy how to first read some ten years ago... well, Stoick had learned long ago to never be surprised by whatever new scheme his son had hatched up.

"What's going on there, Son? Teaching that beast the elementary runes?" He asked with a chuckle.

Startled, Hiccup looked up at him. "S...something like that." He said.

The boy was teaching a dragon how to read. Of course he was. Stoick thought, amused. Odin knew he'd have an easier time teaching that crafty devil how to read than teaching that skill to some of the people he knew. The only surprising thing about that news was that Hiccup didn't get around to it earlier.

"How was your day? Were you and the dragon able to dig up enough boulders for the bridge?"

"Not quite enough. There was an incident at the quarry yesterday - nothing major - but it put us back a little bit. We can go back in a few days to finish up." Hiccup replied.

"What kind of 'incident' are you talking about?" Stoick furrowed his brow. That was the first he had heard of any _incident_ over at the quarry. If there was an accident on site, least of all one where the kids were working, the foreman would not have kept it from him. "Was anybody hurt?" He asked.

Hiccup laughed nervously. "Of course not, Thank the gods!" He laughed some more. "It was all just an... a minor annoyance, that's all." And he kept laughing so that Stoick joined him in nervously laughing as well. And they laughed and laughed and laughed.

"Err, Why exactly are we laughing?"

Hiccup shook his head "I just wasted a few of Toothless' shots so we were not able to finish up today. That's all, Dad." He said with a dismissive wave of his hand. "Anyway, nobody was hurt and that's what's important." Hiccup confirmed once again. "Don't worry about it. We'll go back and finish getting all the boulders out of there

once Toothless recharges his shots. It shouldn't take him more than a couple days."

Stoick looked dubious but said nothing. Something about Hiccup's story didn't exactly ring true.

"Give me a little credit here, Dad! I'm not this walking disaster-magnet just waiting for an accident to pop up wherever I dare to set foot, you know!"

Stoick shook his head. "Of course not, of course not. I didn't mean it like that. Anyway, that's good. Thank the gods that nobody was injured." The chief said with a nod. "Well then, I'll let you get back to your lessons." He turned to leave before he looked over his shoulder to add "Oh, do you mind giving the fire a stir since you're sitting there? It looks to be dying down a bit."

"Sure. No problem."

Stoick saw it out of the corner of his eye, just as he was about to head out to his own business. The boy casually reached a bare hand into the pit of burning logs and red hot volcanic stones to do as was asked of him.

It was the dragon who first screamed, and then the boy.

****Astrid****

Hiccup looked rough. Astrid thought as she looked over her boyfriend on the other side of the door. His hair was a mess, he was as pale as milk, his eyes were dark and the tension in his face screamed agony. That wasn't the worst of him though.

"What happened to your arm? Did Toothless get a craving for a plate of barbecued Hiccup Wings or something?" Astrid asked, pointing to the bandage that was wrapped around his forearm from wrist to elbow.

Hiccup looked at his injured arm and clenched his hand tight. He shook his head. "It's fine. I'll tell you about it later." He said.

"Are you sure about that? It looks nasty."

"It's fine! I said everything is fine, okay?"

Astrid clenched her jaw. "Touchy. Anyway, I was wondering if you could do a little favor for me?" She pulled out an item wrapped in a piece of cloth. "I know this is really short notice, but if you can do this for me I will owe you forever." She unwrapped the bundle to reveal the thick Nadder spike that it contained. "Stormfly gave me this. It's my little sister's birthday tomorrow and I was wondering if you could make a dagger and use the spike as a hilt?"

She noticed Toothless approach from the back of the room, sat down by Hiccup's side and looked over to study the dragon spike in Hiccup's hands. "Hey you!" She said, greeting the dragon and giving him a friendly scratch on the back of his neck. He looked a lot better than he did at the river the day before, she was relieved to see.

Hiccup looked at the spike, and then looked at Toothless, and then back down at the spike, but he did not say anything.

"I'm really sorry that it's such short notice, but it was Stormfly's idea and I just know she's gonna love it, and I will do your work at the quarry today if you want and I will seriously make it up to you in other ways too. Please say you'll do it." She closed the distance between them, knowing exactly what to do to sweeten the deal.

"Okay." He said, looking at Toothless and smiling way too broadly. "One dagger coming up."

Astrid cheered. "Thank you! Thank you! Thank you!" She launched herself at her boyfriend, circling her arms around his thin waist and planting a quick kiss on the lips. "You are so awesome. Ohmygods she's going to totally freak when she sees this!" She said, pulling away from the startled boy. "I'll pick it up tomorrow morning, okay?" Hiccup nodded.

****The Downed Dragons****

The blacksmith yawned heartily. "I'm heading home. Are you going to be here much longer?"

"A few more hours." The boy answered without looking up. He and the Night Fury were hunched over his work desk, mulling over a stack of designs.

"What are you working on that's so important that it can't wait until tomorrow?"

"Oh, just a small favor for a lovesick idiot." He mumbled around clenched teeth and looked up to lock his gaze with the dragon's. "Isn't that right, Toothless?"

Gobber scoffed. "Well, close up once you're done. 'Night Hiccup."

"'Night." He answered and exhaled deeply once he heard the door shut, signaling that they were alone. His arm ached horribly. Dropping the pencil onto the stack of papers on the desk before them, he clenched his fist several times and shook his bandaged arm, trying to relieve some of the pain and tightness from it. It wasn't so much the bite that hurt but then that father of his had to go and slather that foul-smelling glop all over it and it _stung_. He warned him that it was necessary so the wound wouldn't fester. _Curses to_ _that upright bear waddling around in horns and armor like he thinks he's some big imposing tough guy._ _I'll show him a filthy bacteria-riddled cesspool of a mouth! He probably forgot that I already kicked his... _Oh was he ever seething mad!

The dragon nudged him between the shoulders. Right. He had a job to do.

"Don't get me wrong." He said to his dragonesque companion. "I appreciate your help in that little slip-up from earlier today. I really do. I don't imagine touching a burning pit of fire would feel very pleasant for flesh like this." He looked down at the hand that

was only unburnt because of the actions of his quick-thinking buddy. Although he was half curious to know what a burned hand felt like. What proper dragon wouldn't be? He wasn't about to tell the kid that, though. "But for future reference, you do know that you can retract those teeth, right?"

There were other things that he wasn't about to tell the kid either. Like how he could still feel the sensation of being in his girl's embrace... He was there, he saw it all, no need to make it seem like a thing when they were just playing their roles.

He groaned. It wouldn't be much of a curse if it wasn't messy and complicated and unpleasant, he thought, shaking his head and trying to focus on other things that didn't involve the two of them in their current predicament. It was all to be expected. He reassured himself. Although reassuring himself did little to dissipate his unease.

The Night Fury nudged the pencil towards his hand.

"Fine. Fine. Rush me if you want. Won't be my fault if I hand Astrid a piece of junk tomorrow now, would it?"

The Night Fury looked away. "That's better."

He picked up a hammer. It felt comfortable and strangely familiar in his hand. Despite whatever twisted sorcery that nasty piece of work Troll Witch did to them, he still had access to all of his host's skills and abilities. That was a relief. At the very least, being able to walk upright and talk and work those oddly attached thumbs that made easy work of grasping things would make it a lot easier to blend in with the rest of the village while they let the curse work itself out of their systems. It wouldn't be much longer now.

"Okay then. Time to make two girls really happy. Ready to get to work?"

3. Chapter 3

Day 2

****The Downed Dragon****

Thud.

"Stop it, Hiccup! Quit bothering me and let me sleep a little longer. I'm a growing child, remember?" The boy flipped over in bed and buried himself deep under the blanket. It was far too early in the morning to deal with the dragon on the roof who had been trying to rouse him out of bed in the most annoying fashion possible.

Thunk!

He growled. He had been up half the night working on Astrid's dagger and he was in no condition to get up out of that bed. He was naturally nocturnal and usually had no problem working through the night, but whether it was due to a side effect of being stuck in the wrong body, or because of all the stress, or even a mix of the two, he was exhausted to the point that he could barely keep his eyes open

that morning.

Thwack!

"ARGH!" He roared as well as the boy's scrawny lungs permitted. He sat up, reached over the side of the bed to grab a hold of his boot and flung it at the source of aggravation above him. It ricocheted off a ceiling beam and came back down faster than he was able to react, hitting him on top of his head.

The boy slipped out of bed and stretched, but he was not about to admit defeat just yet. He wasn't about to give into the dragon's pestering without a fight. If he couldn't sleep in that bed, then he'd just have to find somewhere else to sleep. Someplace much further away from the hideous sound of dragon claws screeching across the brand new stone tiles lining that roof. The old man was so proud of that stupid roof, saying it could withstand any kind of damage that _devil_ could throw at it, but Toothless wasn't so sure. When he was up there in dragon form it didn't seem all that strong to him, and currently it sounded like Hiccup was doing quite a number on it as well.

Dragging his blanket across the floor behind him, the boy made his way down the stairs and found a corner of the house that looked relatively comfy. He figured he could probably get another half hour of sleep in before the kid figured out he could simply blast the front door open and drag him out. It would be worth it though. He thought as he slid down to the floor and curled up under his blanket and was lulled back to sleep with the thoughts of the stars peppering the sky above his wings and the salty ocean wind misting his face.

"Hiccup? Are you in there?" It was Astrid. _Ahh right_. She said that she would stop by to pick up the dagger that morning, he recalled. Cursing, he stood up clumsily and answered the door.

"Morning Bed Head." She said, looking perfectly well rested and cheerful on the other side of that door.

The midday sun hurt his eyes and he squinted. "Morning, Astrid." He muttered back.

"Were you able to get that dagger made?"

He yawned. "Yep. Come on in." He opened the door completely and stepped aside to let Astrid through. Hiccup came padding into the house right behind her.

"I'm really sorry if you were up late working on it." She said as she walked into the house and followed him across the room.

"Nahhh, it was nothing." He said with a goofy smile, responding in a manner that was as Hiccup-like as he could manage. For good measure he glanced over at Hiccup to pick up on a nonverbal cue or two. It was awkward but if Astrid picked up on the weirdness of it, she didn't say anything. He walked over to his desk and pulled out the dagger that was covered in the same piece of cloth that Astrid gave him the day before; the one containing Stormfly's spikes. "One little-kid dagger, courtesy of big sisters Stormfly and Astrid, and big brothers Toothless and Hiccup." He said as he watched her pull

back the flaps of the cloth. Her bright blue eyes went wide and she gasped when she saw the finished product. He couldn't help but smile when he saw her reaction. "The pommel was Toothless' idea. He plucked out a few scales and I cut them up and made little flower decorations out of them. I hope that's okay."

"It's more than okay. I kinda want to keep it for myself now!" She picked up the little-kid dagger out of the cloth and ran her thumb down an edge. "It's not very sharp though."

"Well, it is for a seven year old..."

"I'm just messing with you. It's beautiful. It's perfect!" She said hugged him tightly. "I seriously have the greatest boyfriend ever. Thank you so much for this!"

She then released him and turned her attention to the dragon who had been sitting there as quiet as a mouse the whole time. She wrapped her arms around his thick neck and gave him a hug as well. He started to purr softly in response to the bit of affection. "Thank you both." She said. "I need to get going. I still have to wrap this up and help my mom make her birthday cake. Are you going to be around tomorrow?"

The boy shrugged. "I don't think I have any plans..."

"Do you wanna hang out then?"

"Sure."

She beamed. "Awesome! I'll see you later then!" She covered the gift back up and ran out the front door. Boy and Dragon watched her leave wordlessly.

"She meant you, you know." The boy said after a few more silent minutes. "She just said it to the face that looked most like yours, that's all." The dragon snorted.

The boy sighed. For the first time since they had the curse put on them, he felt like flying. He looked over at the dragon at his side. The feeling was mutual.

He knew how to work that contraption that worked the tail, and the dragon knew how to manage the rest of it. Although the motions were similar with the wind striking his face and shrieking in his ears, his heart racing in his chest and his lungs aching wonderfully, flying wasn't exactly the same when someone else was doing most of the work. He closed his eyes and raised those scrawny arms, extending them like wings at his sides. He tried to mimic Hiccup's motions, but then the dragon realized that his rider wasn't exactly paying attention to where they were going and didn't even have his hands on the harness and he corrected him with an ear-slap.

"Hiccup you noob! You know I can go three times as fast as this, right?" He said, taunting the dragon a little and trying to goad him into picking up the pace. Hiccup wasn't taking the bait and kept flying at his current speed, keeping their flight nice and safe. Maybe he has the right of it, the boy thought. The last time they were careless in the air, he flew waaaay higher than he ever did with Hiccup aboard - hitting altitudes so high that the thin air

caused his rider to pass out right on his back. And an unconscious tail operator resulted in both dragon and boy plummeting back down to earth. _Fast_. On their way down Toothless did manage to avert a horrible catastrophe by gliding into a cave he spotted on the side of a mountain. So while what could have been a complete disaster was mitigated somewhat, unfortunately for the two of them they had crash landed into a cave that was home to a Troll Witch. A mean-tempered Troll Witch who was most certainly not happy to learn that a dragon and human had torn through her flimsy front door woven together with sticks and leaves and something that looked and smelled like dung; a dragon and human who were plopped down in a tangled mess of wings and limbs and wires right in the middle of her living room. And that Troll Witch was doubly displeased when she realized that the boy regrettably had no left sock to give her in payment for her smashed in door. And so there they were. Stuck in the wrong bodies for the next three days.

Right, best take it easy for now. He thought to himself. Tomorrow, it would all be over and they could go back to normal, and Hiccup could go on his date with Astrid and he could go back to flying and eating decent food again and - best of all - not having to pretend that he was a human boy and all would be right in the world once again.

After their flight, Boy and Dragon sat on the riverbank. Dangling his foot in the icy water and burying his toes deep in the squishy silt at the bottom of the river, the boy watched as the dragon finally managed to snatch a fish from the water. "Nice!" He cheered, pumping a fist in the air. And then he watched as the dragon hesitantly sniffed at his lunch in front of him before searing it with a bolt of fire.

The boy rolled his eyes. Cooking fish totally ruins the flavor. What a waste of perfectly good fish, he thought. "How many times do I have to tell you that's not the right way..." The dragon looked at him knowingly before pushing the remaining half of his fish "the uncooked half" towards him. "Thanks, Bud." he said, picking up the offered lunch.

4. Chapter 4

Day 3

****The Downed Dragon****

It was the morning of the third day - the day that everything was supposed to get fixed - and the boy felt no different than he did the day before. He brushed it off. It was too early in the day. The accident took place while they were goofing off during their lunch break, so technically it wouldn't be exactly 'three days' until midday at least. Of course! It made perfect sense. There was nothing to be concerned about, he told himself.

Lunchtime had passed and he still felt no different. The boy was beginning to feel anxious. He needed to get the two of them back into their regular bodies and fast. He thought back to that day and tried to recall everything that had happened. The Troll Witch said that the curse would resolve itself in three days or so. Was it three days? Or did she tack on that _or so_ as a way to mess with them even more?

That had to be it! She lied to them! That filthy beast! He knew he should have gutted her then and there on that mountain, despite Hiccup's protests. A dead Troll wouldn't be going around casting no curses, after all. _ARGH!_

He flew the dragon back to the site of the crash. They found the cave easily enough, but there was no Troll there, no pile of junk that used to be a door, nothing. There was no sign that a Troll or any creature had ever lived there. He kicked a rock across the cave. "Are you kidding me?" The boy said to nobody in particular.

Out of ideas, he looked at his companion. "So what do we do now?"

It hit him then. Of course! The witch was waiting for them to fix what was broken. He should have thought of that before. The boy ran outside and began to drag in armfuls of sticks and twigs and whatever debris he could find on the trail leading up to the cave, and the two of them began to put together a new door for that little cave. Without much effort they managed to cobble together a new door. It wasn't anything special since they had no tools or even some decent planks of lumber, but it was a lot nicer and sturdier than the one they had accidentally destroyed.

"HEEEY TROLL LADY~~~~ WE FIXED YOUR DOOR FOR YOU!" The boy yelled, his voice echoing in the emptiness. "COME BACK HERE AND TAKE A LOOK!" They waited, and waited. And they remained there in that dank little cave and kept waiting until well after the sun had gone down. No Troll showed up to admire their handiwork.

Could they have the wrong cave he wondered? "This is the place, right?" He asked his silent buddy.

****Astrid****

"Hey! Where have you been?" It was well after dinner, and she found Hiccup and Toothless just arriving at his house. "We had a date today, remember?"

"Oh, right." Hiccup said softly, looking at the ground in front of him. "Sorry Astrid, something came up that Toothless and I had to deal with today. So I'll have to make it up to you later."

"Nonsense, you can make it up to me now." She grabbed him by the arm and dragged him towards the docks. "Let's go!"

Stormfly was splashing around the rocks and pools that littered the shoreline, occasionally squawking at the Night Fury, trying to get him to join in her fun, but Toothless wasn't having any of that. Astrid noticed. _I kinda know how she feels..._ Astrid thought to herself as she looked over at her date who didn't seem to be at all interested in sharing any of her company either. Okay. Something had been distracting him all week, she wondered how she would be able to get the story out of him.

"Toothless is acting weird, huh?" She asked.

Hiccup didn't say anything. He was too busy staring off at the lonely Nadder who was keeping herself occupied by diving for goodies trapped between the shoreline rocks.

"You notice it too, huh? Isn't it weird?" She asked.

"What do you mean?"

"Stormfly. Look at her. She's preening and playing and trying her best to get Toothless to join in, but he's completely ignoring her. He's just staring over at us."

Hiccup nodded. "Yeah, I dunno what his problem is. Stormfly's hot."

Okay, what?

Astrid raised an eyebrow. Hiccup's eyes went wide immediately as he realized what he said. "You know, for a dragon. I... I suppose." He backtracked, laughing nervously.

Astrid chuckled. "You're sweet. And totally weird, and a little creepy, but sweet." She smiled sweetly and scooted closer to her date. The wind sweeping over the ocean was picking up and she was beginning to feel a chill.

"The sky sure is clear tonight." She remarked, dropping her head on her boyfriend's shoulder, and carefully taking his hand into her own, intertwining their fingers together.

****The Drowned Dragon****

His heart began to race when he realized what was happening. _This isn't good._ There she was pressed up flush against him and asking strange questions about Hiccup. The boy wondered if the dragon told the Deadly Nadder anything. No, he wouldn't have. They had an agreement to keep all of this quiet, and he knew enough about how to read dragon as well as human cues to know if either of the girls suspected anything.

But still... She had been coming around more and more often since the whole fiasco started. Even if she didn't suspect anything, Hiccup had to have noticed that...

"It's not just the dragons. Something's different about you too." She said.

The boy laughed nervously. "No there isn't."

"There is." She said, looking into his eyes and pushing aside an errant lock of hair that was caught in the wind behind her ear. "It's really subtle but it's there. It's like... I can't tell if you've grown or you're just standing up straighter, or your shoulders have gotten wider, but you're a little different. It's like our own Hiccup but with a little swagger."

Oh no oh no, he hoped the kid wasn't hearing any of this. And he thought this day couldn't get any worse. He started blabbing about how she was just imagining things and he was the same Hiccup everyone knew and loved and how he was absolutely fine.

"HICCUP!" She pinched his arm lightly.

"Huh? What?"

"What I am trying to say is, if you don't feel like talking, then kiss me or something so I don't feel like a complete idiot going on and on about nothing wasting both of our time!" She said.

"I... uh... don't..." She grabbed the front of his shirt in her fist and pulled him close. He tried to squirm away, but she placed her other hand on the back of his head, lacing her fingers in his hair to keep him right where she wanted him. And she pressed her parted lips against his own. Her breath was so warm... He was melting into it...

No. It wasn't him. It was the human instinct hardwired in every cell in that body. The natural instinct of a man needing to be close to the one he loved. He wrapped his arms around the girl's waist, pulling her close to him as well. Her mouth... so warm... so soft... He felt dizzy.

"Don't forget to breathe, dummy." Astrid teased when he pulled away for air, pressing tiny butterfly kisses on his brow, and then his nose, and then the corner of his mouth... The world was spinning. And then he forgot himself as he found her wicked teasing mouth, again and again...

Oh gods no why can't I pull away? He could just feel the dragon staring him down. He pushed her away and scrambled to his feet. "TOOTHLESS!" He called out even as he was trying to catch his breath.

"What is wrong with you?" Astrid asked.

"I'm sorry, but we really gotta go!"

"Where?" She was incredulous. "Where do you possibly have to be at this hour?"

"The quarry! We have to go to the quarry! I promised my dad we'd finish up our work today, but I didn't have a chance to go." He hopped up onto Toothless' saddle and they took off.

"At this hour? Are you insane?" She yelled as they disappeared into the darkness.

****Astrid****

Sure enough, she found Hiccup in the quarry, exactly where he said he would be. She hung back and watched from behind some trees. She knew that if she got any closer, Hiccup would bolt, and she didn't want that. She was perfectly happy just observing him that night.

Upon further reflection, that date wasn't as disastrous as she first thought when Hiccup ran off acting like his hair was on fire, she thought. She learned quite a lot.

She watched her aggravating, scrawny, adorable fishbone of a boyfriend inexplicably brandishing about a hammer that looked like it weighed twice as much as he did. He was yelling and grunting and screaming and cursing as he took out all the frustrations - that he wasn't sharing with her - on a hapless pile of boulders.

And then a perfectly docile Night Fury, silently walked up and sat down next to her and the Deadly Nadder, observing just as she was.

"He's gonna totally break an arm if he keeps swinging that hammer around like that." Astrid mumbled.

Toothless snorted.

"I wish you could tell me how and-or why he got that bump on the back of his head, Pal."

5. Chapter 5

Day 4

****The Flying Fishbone****

The boy lay in his bed and stared at the ceiling for however much time had passed since he woke up that morning. Minutes, hours, he wasn't exactly sure how long. He was waiting for his best friend to come around and wake him up, but there was no dragon-signal from above that morning.

He sighed. He felt absolutely horrible. "I'm sorry." He said softly. And then he sat up and realized that he felt horrible _and_ significantly lighter. He pulled back the covers and swung his leg over the side of the bed. Just leg. The detachable one was gone. _Oh real mature, Buddy. You're going to punish me by hobbling your own body just because of a stupid kiss?_!_ "How could you do this to me? I SAID I WAS SORRY FOR KISSING YOUR GIRLFRIEND!" He cried.

"Hiccup! What are you going on about?"

"Uh, nothing Dad!"

"Get down here, your breakfast is getting cold."

"Hey Dad, is Toothless down there?"

"Why would he be down here? He's outside!"

"Err... how about my leg? You wouldn't happen to see it down there by any chance, do you?"

"What are you talking about? Why would your leg be downstairs?"

"Nothing. Nevermind~" Ugh, this was going to be bad.

Those stairs were going to be a problem in his situation, he thought as he scanned the room for a crutch or something. The thought of scooting downstairs using his hands and backside sounded about as appealing as asking the old man to come up there and help him, he thought as his eyes settled on a shield that was hung up on the wall across the room. It looked wide enough and sturdy enough to support his weight...

The boy took it off the wall and studied it for a second. There was a painting of a deranged-looking Viking staring back at him. Probably a family ancestor or something. It gave him the creeps. He wondered how that poor kid could sleep in that room with those dead eyes staring down at him, but it wasn't the image on the shield that was important. It could actually work, the boy thought as he balanced the center of the shield on the lip of the top stair and sat down on top of it. He held onto the shield with one hand and pushed off with the other.

****Astrid****

"I like it." Astrid said after swallowing a bite of chicken, gesturing to the black patch covering her boyfriend's right eye with the drumstick in her hand. "The whole pirate thing works for you." She said.

Hiccup wasn't talking during their lunch either. She noted as the side of her mouth twitched ever so slightly.

"How did that happen, anyway?" She asked.

"_Stair sledding_." The village chief said as he walked past the two of them. He looked just as tired and defeated as his son. She watched as the huge man left the hall without saying another word.

Hiccup shrugged. "Eh, it seemed like the best way to get down the stairs." He said. It did not sound like that was the first time he used that particular excuse that day.

"And you're limping because..."

"Because I grew out of this stupid thing last year and it's almost an inch too short now." He pointed to the backup that was strapped to his left leg.

Astrid couldn't wait to hear the details of _that_, but she had other matters on her mind.

"Oh good. Since you're not going anywhere, why don't you tell me how you got that bump on the back of your head." She said.

Hiccup winced. _Gotcha_. She thought. "What are you talking about?" He asked unconvincingly.

"There's a bump." She leaned over the table to reach across and guide his hand to its location on the back of his head. "I felt it last night when we were kissing." She explained.

"That's always been there." He said.

Astrid rolled her eyes. "So you got hurt. Why do you feel the need to lie about it?"

"Because if I told you or the old man or anybody else in this village that a Troll put a curse on us, none of you would believe me anyway and Hiccup went through quite an adventure in order to shed that perception of him that you all had, and I don't imagine that's an image he would like to cultivate once again.

Astrid shook her head, and then sat back down in her seat. "What 'Troll', and why are you talking in the third person?"

"I'm not talking in the third person because I'm not Hiccup." He leaned across the table and spoke softly. "Hiccup is somewhere in my real body outside destroying perfectly good fish and doing Odin knows what else all while ignoring me right now because I kissed you yesterday."

Astrid blinked. "So you're saying that you are... Toothless."

"Yes. That is exactly what I am saying."

She blinked again. "And all these changes in the two of you happened because a... Troll did it? It has nothing to do with the fact that you clearly hit your head on something?"

Hiccup bristled. "See, this is the exact reason why I didn't want to say anything! The last thing we need is you making fun of us."

"I'm not making fun of you, Hiccup, I'm trying to give you a different perspective."

"I don't need a different perspective. I was there! I know where she lives."

"Oh you do? Good! Let's go. I've never seen a Troll before."

He grimaced. "Well, the thing is, we went there yesterday and she apparently took off somewhere."

"Ah, so she's gone now." Astrid nodded.

He pointed at the door to the great hall. "Just look at Hic... at the dragon! You even said that he's been acting off."

"Yes, I did say that, but all I see is a dragon that is concerned because his best friend suffered a head injury and hasn't been right since."

"He hid my leg!"

"He's trying to slow you down. Maybe your whole Hiccup!Smash routine from last night is freaking him out. It did quite a number on me as well, I have to tell you."

"You saw that?"

"Did you really think I wouldn't follow you?"

Hiccup dropped his head in his hands.

"Hiccup, you made that dagger for me. That was all Hiccup's work."

His shoulders slumped. "I have all his knowledge and memories. Everything. It was Hiccup's skill that made that knife. I just carried out the instructions."

"Well isn't that a handy little loophole she left you. Having all of

each others' skills and and memories and..." _Everything_. Astrid's face went dark red. Her eyes grew wide and she clasped a hand over her mouth. "..._everything_-everything?"

Hiccup waved a hand dismissively. "Oh, you don't have to worry about _that_! I already knew about it before this whole mess started."

Astrid jumped over the table that separated the two of them, and she tackled him onto the floor.

"Ack! There are people watching!" Hiccup said, but not very loudly. His voice was muffled from the weight of the girl straddling his back and pinning his arm against his body, preventing him from pushing her off.

"You just shut your mouth about that!" She said through closed teeth.

"Oh come on! It's not like the two of you were all that discreet about it." He laughed.

"Shut up! Shut up! SHUT UP!"

"Why are you so embarrassed anyway? It's not like you think I'm actually Toothless."

"Just... figure this out and get back to normal!" Astrid said as she scanned the hall. Nobody was paying any attention to her, that was good. She rolled off of Hiccup and offered a hand to help him get back upright.

"What do you think I've been doing?" Hiccup said.

"Figure it out faster then!" Astrid exhaled deeply. "I think I'm going to go now. I need to break something."

"Please don't tell anyone this, Astrid."

"Yeah, you don't have to worry about that." She pushed that annoying errant lock of hair back behind the ear where it never wanted to stay, despite her best efforts to keep it there. "So what am I supposed to call you anyway?" She asked.

"Huh?" Hiccup looked up.

"You say that you're not Hiccup, and I can't exactly go around calling you Toothless. So what exactly should I call you? _Toothcup_?"

He frowned. "Hiccup's fine."

She smiled. "Are you sure, Toothcup seems more appropriate for you." She teased.

"Please don't call me Toothcup." He was blushing. She hated it when he blushed like that. It made it hard for her to be angry.

"Well, I'll see you later, I guess."

"Astrid, if you see Toothless out there, can you send him to me?"

Ahh Toothless. "Oh, right. About that..." She punched the boy lightly on the shoulder. "That's for kissing your best friend's girlfriend." She said.

"But I thought you didn't believe me!"

"I _don't_ believe you, but seeing as you obviously _do_ believe you, that makes you guilty all the same! Now if you'll excuse me..." She ran out of the hall.

* * *

><p>Ahh, that was a good workout! Astrid thought as she made her way to the lake in the cove. Her arms were aching nicely and her heart was pumping, and it was just the perfect weather for a quick swim to cool herself off.<p>

She took off her boots and then began working on undoing the belt at her waist when her eye caught a familiar flash of black dragonscale peeking out from between the branches of a tree.

"Hey Toothless!" She waved and stopped undressing. The swim did not seem like such a good idea anymore. _Stupid Hiccup planting stupid ideas in my head._ She waded a couple steps into the lake, settling on just soaking her feet. Toothless hopped down from his perch and ran up to her. He lowered his head so she could give him a scratch under his chin._>

"You are Toothless, right?" She asked, as the dragon nuzzled against her hand.

6. Chapter 6

Day 5

****The Little Dragon****

The night sky was unusually clear, he thought from his perch atop the roof of the boy's house. _Pretty_. Astrid would like this, he thought. He considered going to fetch her and then thought better of it. It was the middle of the not-exactly-warm night and he was the only fool laying outside on a roof while the rest of the village slept in their beds. Besides, she probably wasn't in any mood to see him. He didn't blame her, he wasn't in any mood to deal with himself either. After all that happened, the fact that he was still thinking up ways to impress the girl instead of focusing on the actual problem at hand made him want to smack himself upside the head. It was no wonder the dragon was still avoiding him. He thought. He would avoid himself as well if it was possible. But it wasn't possible, and that was his challenge.

Everything was so messed up. Could Astrid be right? He wondered. Was this all in his head and there was never any Troll or any curse and all of this could be simply resolved at any moment by choosing to believe it to be so? He tried to sort through his memories, trying to

think back to that day, trying to find something that would help clarify the whole situation for him. He sorted through his own memories, and those he inherited when he was put in that body. He remembered those days playing by the lake, learning to fly with the boy's aid, and then tearing through the skies once they had done so.

And then he realized that the only memories he had as a dragon were those that he shared with Hiccup.

All of the boy's memories were available to him. A faint memory of being held by a figure whose face was shrouded in white mists, forever lost to time - a woman rocking him gently in her arms and humming softly to him as he was enveloped by sweet warm slumber.

He remembered getting violently sick the first time his father took him on a boat; the first time an ax was placed in his hands and how it went (terribly); the time they took away that ax and replaced it with a smith's hammer and how that went (terribly but also kind of amazingly at the same time). He recalled when he showed his father the very first contraption he came up with to do his bit to help fight off the raiding dragons. The device ended up singeing off half of the old man's illustrious beard on the first demonstration, and that was the end of that. And the beginning of that, in another way. The old man ended up having to shave the whole thing off to balance out both sides, and the poor guy was just not in a good place existentially until it grew back some months later.

And he remembered that one night where the perfect opportunity to bag himself a dragon presented itself. And not just any dragon either. A Night Fury. He would need an especially impressive trophy to earn his father's respect.

He swallowed uneasily. The night winds were howling but he couldn't hear any of it. There was complete silence all around him.

Astrid was right, huh? He had no memories of being a hatchling, of growing up and unfurling his wings for the first time. Of parents or siblings or his relationship with anyone outside of Hiccup. There was nothing there before he met the boy " before he met Hiccup.

And then the silence was shattered.

"So you figured it out, did you?" _That troll..._

His heart began to race as the temperature around him soared, in that instant he found himself no longer on the roof of his house, waiting for his friend to show up so he could apologize properly. The night sky full of stars was gone, replaced by complete blackness, but the scent around him was unmistakable, as was the sweltering itchy warmth of the wool blanket covering him. He was sitting in his bed. He was drenched in sweat. And when he realized he had company, he was freezing cold.

The Troll Witch laughed that same maniacal cackle that was the last thing he heard before his body was switched. He strained his eyes and scanned the room, but he didn't see anyone or anything other than vague outlines where the furniture was placed. He wished he had his dragon eyes. As a Night Fury he wasn't so blind in the darkness.

"Where are you?" He called out softer than he wanted, but there was his dad to consider and he didn't want to wake him.

"Did you have a nice dream?" She asked in her gravelly voice.

"Whatever, you can't mock me anymore, I figured it out."

"Well it's a good thing you did. You didn't seem to be adapting too well in that body." He felt a thin, bony finger press against his tender, injured eye, and it hurt. He winced and pulled back away from the touch. "It would have been a shame if you incurred any lasting damage..."

"It's all just as Astrid said. There was never any curse and you don't even exist. I was injured when I hit my head and just imagined all this up because my head was messed up."

"I don't exist? You merely summoned me up from nothingness into your psyche to tell me off on this night at this very hour, is that it?"

"Exactly. You're not real." He reached over to the table next to his bed, feeling around for the candle and flint he kept there. She wasn't there, and he would prove it to himself, as soon as he could get some light in there...

He heard footsteps shuffling away from him and then the rustling of papers across the room.

"Hey! Stop going through my stuff!"

"_Your_ stuff? So that's definitely the outcome on which you landed? That you are the one they call Hiccup and the dragon is the one they call Toothless and when you wake and leave this house tomorrow morning and go about the rest of your life as the boy called Hiccup, that you'll be completely satisfied with that decision and you won't have any lingering doubts that you got it all wrong and your best friend isn't stuck in that voiceless body all while you sleep in his bed and eat his food and have warm and fuzzy times with his mate? Is my work here done?"

He could feel phantom flames welling up inside of him. "Listen, wench. I don't know what your problem is with me, but it doesn't matter. Do whatever you want with me, just leave him out of this. If you..."

"...lay a finger on your precious little friend then the two of us are gonna have a problem?" She mocked. "You talk big for being stuck in such a small body."

"We fixed your house! We made an even nicer door! What more do you want from us?"

She scoffed. "That wasn't even my house. I was just in the right place at the right time when the two of you showed up."

"Why?"

"Because I don't like dragons. Do I need a reason to have a little fun?"

"Well good! Fine. Mess with me all you want but leave him out of this. Just reverse whatever it was you did, and do whatever you deem is appropriate to me to deal with your dragon issues or your amusement issues or whatever. It's severely messed up that I was the one who you have a problem with and he's taking the brunt of the curse. I'll give you my flames - that's gotta be worth a whole lot more to you than teasing us like this for your own amusement."

"Your flames. Hmm... A dragon extinguishing his fires permanently for the benefit of a human child. That's quite a sacrifice I must say. Although, I don't imagine a domesticated dragon really has much use for his flames, so maybe it's not."

"I am not domesticated." He growled.

"And, sadly for you, my amusement is worth far more to me than your piddly fireballs. But I can't say that I'm not touched by your concern for this precious human of yours. Especially under the circumstances. You know how I gave you each others' memories. Did you like that? It's nice to get a glimpse of each others' boring day-to-days and your loves and heartaches and those darkest regrets that keep you up every night just gnawing away at the pit of your belly. What other two friends could say they are so lucky?"

"What are you blathering on about?"

"You have lost your wings and now you want to give up your flames for the sake of the one who took them from you. It's lovely, really."

He pursed his lips. "I knew about that a long time ago." He muttered.

"And you knew about his unbridled joy as he watched you plummet to earth?"

"That was a different person."

"No, he wasn't. Yes, this is all very touching. You forgiving him completely. Forgiveness is such a human concept, don't you think? My people have a saying how humans are simply dragons who had their wings clipped. It would appear that there is a bit of truth to it."

"And my people have a saying as well. That troll bones with a side of honeyed apples make an especially tasty dessert."

"Hah! Should I be terrified, Little Dragon?" She said in an ugly singsong tone that made him want to throttle her. And he bristled. She was not wrong. There wasn't much bone chomping he could do with those stupid flat horse teeth of his.

"This is getting tiresome. I think I'll go for a walk. See if there's anyone else in this village who can provide better entertainment than you. There are quite a few dragons around here, I've noticed."

"You. Leave. Now. This village. Seriously. I've vanquished nightmares

that you can't even begin to imagine. Call this an empty threat or mock me or whatever, but you need to end this now while I'm still feeling forgetful."

"Right, right." He could feel her breath against his cheek. It was humid and foul and smelled of spiderwebs and mildew. "I grow tired of this. Goodnight, Little Dragon." And he felt his mouth smothered by hers. Before he could think of reacting, he was enveloped by complete darkness.

****Astrid****

She found him on her morning ride, fast asleep and tangled up in the upper branches of a tall old tree located on the outskirts of the village. _Well it can't be said that he's not taking this dragon thing seriously._ She thought.

"Hiccup." She called out.

He responded by twitching a leg and muttering something unintelligible.

"HICCUP!" She called out again, louder. His uninjured eye cracked open.

"Astrid." He said to the dragon riding girl who was hovering at his branch level far off the ground. "Good morning." He said, and then grabbed the branch that was cradling him for extra support like he just noticed where he was.

They took a walk in the forest after their breakfast. It was nice but awkward at the same time. Hiccup wasn't exactly talkative, and his bad leg fitted with the prosthetic he had outgrown left him needing to either find a cane or lean on her for support. He went with the cane.

"I've been doing a lot of thinking about all this." He said, finally after being quiet forever.

"Oh?"

"Yeah. I could dismiss all of this and chalk it up to hitting my head and all that stuff, and it would make complete and perfect sense."

"Why do I have a feeling the next word out of your mouth is gonna be 'but'?"

"... _but_. If there's even a tiny chance that there is a Troll curse at play here, I can't dismiss that. I can't leave him trapped in a dragon body. I can't steal his life from him like that."

"No, I suppose you can't. And I don't want that for him either."

"So you do believe me."

"I get the feeling that you don't know what you believe anymore. So probably on some level I do."

"Yeah, you're not wrong."

Hiccup sighed and looked up at the pinpoints of sunlight piercing through the dark green canopy above their heads. "Have you seen ah.. Toothless around?"

"Yeah." Astrid replied, nodding. "He's around."

"Can you send him back to me? I hate how things are weird between us."

"I'm sure he feels the same way." She said smiling.

"Or at least, can you have him give me back that stupid leg?" He asked with a meek shrug and crooked smile.

7. Chapter 7

Day 6

****Astrid****

The chief towered over her, but at that moment he looked smaller and frailer than she had ever imagined possible, and she wondered if it counted as a lie to withhold information. He had asked her if anything was wrong with Hiccup and she just stood there in the center of the village looking up at the man – his shoulders heavy and his eyes dark with worry. He had not seen Hiccup or his dragon in over a day and while that wasn't unusual under normal circumstances, he was very well aware that Hiccup was behaving anything but normal those days. Of course he noticed something was wrong. What with the almost sticking his hand in a fire thing, the more-distracted-than-usual faraway gaze in his eyes, oh yeah, and the whole bit about riding down the stairs atop a shield. And not to mention the the thing about his dragon buddy no longer having any interest in any dragon happenings around town. You'd have to be a total moron to not realize that something was seriously messed up!

His eyes were the worst though. They reminded her so much of Hiccup that just standing looking at the older man felt like a punch in the gut. She wondered if she looked at Hiccup some thirty years in the future if those same eyes would look back at her. She wondered if she would ever look at Hiccup again.

"Astrid?"

"Huh?" She realized that was just standing there looking up at him like an idiot while he waited forever for her to answer his question. She promised Hiccup but... "I'm sorry! There was an accident and Hiccup hit his head." There. That was exactly what happened.

"He hit his head? Is that it?"

Astrid nodded.

The chief shook his head. "Hiccup's been hitting his head on things ever since he could hold it up. He has a bit of resilience built up in that skull of his. I don't know..."

"It was a bad fall! And he didn't have his helmet, and you know head

injuries aren't something to ever be taken lightly! It messes up your thoughts, you know? Like, for instance, it could make you think that â€" hypothetically speaking - a Troll came along and switched up bodies between you and â€" oh I don't know, say a Night Fury dragon." Astrid finished and took a deep breath. _THERE! I SAID IT!_ She flailed.

"What the..."

"Hypothetically speaking!" She interrupted with a laugh. "ARGH! I GOTTA GO!" And with that, Astrid ran off before he could ask any more questions. _Well that could have gone better._ She thought after she had put some distance between the two of them. She felt horrible. Hiccup would not be happy about that, but she couldn't keep quiet. It was all his damn fault anyway for running off and making everyone worry.

"Ugh."

It was so stupid of her to agree to keep their little secret to herself while they figured it out how to fix everything on their own. And how long did they expect her to wait while they tripped over themselves trying to catch that Troll anyway? She did the right thing, and she needed to do more. She had to go back and tell the chief everything else she knew, everything that Hiccup had told her and everything that she had seen. Astrid ran back to the village but the older man was nowhere to be found. She tried his house and the great hall, but he was gone. She tried waiting for him at the front door of his house, and she waited for an hour, waiting for him or for Hiccup or Toothless. Finally she gave up, muttered a curse and took off out of the village. She had to get out of there before she ran into someone else like Gobber or one of the other teens. She didn't think she could handle dealing with anyone else right then. She was going to find Hiccup or Toothless-playing-Hiccup and they were going to finish this, whether by themselves, or with help from the chief, she didn't care. Hiccup needed to be back.

She made her way to the river at the site where the new half-completed bridge stood and she took a breather, making a seat out of one of the basalt columns strewn about, and took in the mid-morning sun. She was exhausted and she realized that she hadn't eaten yet, but she had no appetite. But she needed energy if she was going to be out all day looking. A power shake would hit the spot, she thought, considering going back to the village for a quick breakfast. A horrible concoction of sheep's milk, raw eggs, pickled herring, a handful of the dragon grass growing out in the back yard that Stormfly was always chomping down, and a little bit of honey... Mmmm... Her stomach began to rumble as the thought of food woke it up.

A pack of Terrible Terrors swooped down and scampered up to greet her. She gave each a scratch behind the ear. "Hey guys." She said. "You wouldn't have happened to see a Night Fury walking around in a human body, would you?" She asked. One of them, the red one with the yellow markings around its horns, looked up at her and tilted its head to the side. Astrid laughed. "I know! Right? It's so stupid that I'm even considering the possibility that Hiccup is right and he really is Toothless walking around in Hiccup's body!" She said, speaking it aloud only reinforced how ridiculous the whole thing was and she laughed.

"Hiccup's really Toothless walking around in Hiccup's body?" A familiar voice asked. Astrid jumped startled and looked behind her to find Snotlout and Ruffnut standing there, watching her interactions with the little Terrors very intently.

"AAAAH! What are you guys doing here?"

Ruffnut shrugged. "Same as you. We work here, remember? But lets just back up for a second. What's with this thing about Hiccup you just said?"

"I didn't say anything! I'm just a little frustrated with him because of none of your business so I was just wondering out loud whether the real Hiccup was snatched away by a Troll or a witch or something. You misunderstood me because you sneaked up on me and didn't hear the whole thing. That's all. And why didn't you call yourselves out anyway? That's very rude!"

Snotlout stood there with crossed arms and looked at her dubiously. Ruffnut didn't say anything either as they waited for an explanation and details they both knew she couldn't keep to herself.

Astrid looked around nervously. "It's just the two of you here? Where are Fishlegs and Tuffnut?" She asked.

"Legs took Horrorcow and her babies for a flight and Tuff's lazy ass slept in this morning. It's just us." Ruffnut said.

"Fine." Astrid explained everything that was going on. She couldn't tell if they believed her, but she was beyond caring. She needed their help in tracking him down, and that was all that mattered. When she finished relaying the story, Lout and Ruff were both sitting cross-legged at the base of her column, listening intently. "Anyway, that's all I know, and neither Hiccup or Toothless have been seen since early yesterday morning. We need to find him. That's it. Storytime is done."

Snotlout stood up and brushed the dirt from his pants. "I'm in." He said.

"Really?"

"Yeah really. The kid's family. I'm not going to let him linger out there all by himself. We'll make him right."

"I'm coming with." Ruff added. "I need to see this Hiccup-Toothless hybrid with my own eyes." She said.

Astrid smiled. "Thanks, guys." She said and watched as they took off back in the direction of town.

"Well that's two more people who know." She said to nobody in particular once the two teens were out of sight.

"Two more people who know what?" Another familiar voice, but this one made her want to tackle its owner to the ground and sit on his back and pin him there until he promised never to run off without telling anybody again.

"Hiccup! Where have you been? Your father thinks you're lying dead in a ditch somewhere!" Her voice cracked embarrassingly, and she channeled all her energy into holding back the huge, ugly sob that was beginning to swell within her. He had only been gone a day and he was already beginning to look feral. His hair was a mess, the fingers of both his hands were black, his visible eye had a dark ring around it, his face and clothes were covered in dirt.

"So you told everyone? They all know?"

"Lout and Ruff know, but that was an accident of sorts."

Hiccup sighed. "Who else knows?"

"Well. I told your dad that you hit your head."

"That's it? That's all he knows?"

Astrid looked down at her mud caked boots. "I may have planted a suggestion that the bump to your head put you under the delusion that a Troll put a spell on you and Toothless."

"Really, Astrid?"

"I had to tell him. That poor man's been losing sleep over how you've been acting this past week. Are you upset with me?"

He shook his head. "No. I think we got it figured out anyway." Toothless also emerged from the tall grasses growing on the river bank and joined Hiccup.

Astrid looked up, her face brightening.

****Snotlout****

"Hold up, first I need to go grab my ax." Lout said once they reached the village and he took a quick detour to his house.

"What for?" Ruff asked.

"To help Hiccup. Of course. Isn't that what our quest for the day is?" He bent over the deep shed next to his house where they stored their weapons and emerged a moment later with a smallish ax in his hand.

Ruffnut scoffed. "Well if we're going Troll hunting, you'd better hope it's a little one if that's the best weapon you can find."

"We're not going Troll hunting. We're going Hiccup hunting and I'm going to knock that Troll out of his head." Snotlout explained.

"So you don't believe Astrid?"

"I believe that this all started with a bump to the head, and that's how it's gotta end." He explained and began walking out of the yard when he spotted a very familiar stick figure scamper over to the chief's house. It was clearly Hiccup but... "Huh. Looks like he's back. Well this will be easy." Snotlout said with a shrug.

"At least let me talk to him first. I'm kinda curious to see what he's acting like if he thinks he's really Toothless."

They approached the chief's house. "Okay. Here is the plan. You distract him and I'll hide the ax on the other side of the door, waiting for the right moment to strike." He instructed. "When you find the right moment and you're satisfied with talking to him or whatever say the code word and I'll grab it and knock some sense into him."

Ruffnut nodded. "Right."

"But be discreet! Don't just blurt it out, work it into a conversation or something."

"Okay fine. Let's do this."

With their plan worked out, the two teenagers made their way to the front door of the chief's house. Ruffnut waited as Snotlout hid his weapon behind a pile of wood on the side of the house, and when he joined her at the door, she knocked.

Hiccup answered.

"Hey, what's up?" He asked, seemingly normal. Almost too normal. Snotlout thought. His hair was a mess and his eyes were droopy, he had clearly just woken up, but he had seen him run back to his house look more put together than that.

"Hey. We didn't see you down by the bridge today." Ruffnut said. "We just wanted to stop by and see if everything is okay."

Hiccup shrugged. "Oh." He yawned, "I just woke up. Dad had me doing some extra work last night making some reinforcements for the bridge." He explained.

"Your Dad?" Ruffnut asked. Snotlout knew what she was thinking because he was thinking the same thing. According to Astrid, Hiccup had been missing last night and the chief was worried sick over that.

"Yeah, you know. The big guy who lives here. Prize-winning beard. Not much in the way of subtlety." Hiccup said. "Do you guys want to come in? I'm about to make some breakfast." He turned their back on them and that was when Snotlout noticed a weird ridge on Hiccup's back growing down the length of his spine. It was visible through his shirt. Ruff noticed it too, he was sure of that as the girl turned to look at him with panic and confusion in her eyes.

"You wouldn't happen to be cooking up some cabbage root would you?" Ruffnut blurted. "I got a craving." The code word. Snotlout scrambled to retrieve his ax before he felt Hiccup's scrawny hand grab him by the hair and violently yank him into the house.

"What are you planning on doing with that ax there?" Hiccup asked, at least it sounded like Hiccup, but the strength he exerted was inhuman for any of them, the least of all Hiccup! "Hit me in the head with it?" Snotlout watched in horror as Hiccup grabbed each of them by the face and held on with a grip so strong it hurt. He began to panic, thinking that Hiccup could crush in his skull with whatever

superhuman strength he discovered. And then he felt the air being sucked out of his lungs. His eyesight began to go blurry as he looked between Hiccup's fingers that covered his face, and he saw Ruffnut struggling as well, clawing at her neck gasping for breath just as he was, raking futilely at the clawed, withered hand of the one that had attacked them.

"I think I'll like it here." He heard someone say, a faraway voice, and then it was over. Hiccup let go and he fell to the ground. He still couldn't breathe and his vision was fading in an out "more out than in. He tried to look around for Ruff. He could hear her thrashing somewhere close, but he couldn't see her and he couldn't find the strength to lift his head. But he did notice Hiccup standing above him, looking nothing like Hiccup at all. And then he saw complete darkness as everything faded away.

****Astrid****

"Be careful here." Hiccup warned as their hike took them into the woods. He put up an arm to keep her from stepping any further into the clearing where he and Toothless had led her.

Astrid looked around but did not see anything particularly interesting. It looked like any other clearing in the woods. Though on further review she noticed that the ground looked like it had been turned over recently. That would explain Hiccup looking like he took a dirt bath, she thought.

"We spent all day and night yesterday installing the Troll trap under the ground here, and the slightest bit of weight in the wrong spot will set it off, so keep back. Once it goes off, we'll have to bury the thing all over again." Hiccup explained.

"That doesn't sound much like a 'Troll' trap, to be honest." Astrid shrugged. "It sounds more like an 'Anything' trap if the slightest bit of weight will set it off." Hiccup glared at her. For an instant she remembered Toothless giving her that very same look a long time ago on the first day they met, and she found it strangely comforting.

"It's the bait that we're going to use which is what will make it a Troll trap." Hiccup explained.

"Oh! Right. I get it." Astrid peeled off her left boot and sock, balled it up and threw it into the clearing. Hiccup looked at her and blinked. "What? That wasn't your bait?" She asked.

"I suppose we could use your sock as bait." Hiccup said. "Of course if we do, we'll need to put up a sign that says 'Free sock! P.S. Totally not a trap!'"

"Okay, okay!" Astrid jammed her bare foot back into the boot, while Hiccup and Toothless retrieved the sock for her from the air, and even then they acted as delicately as possible. She was curious if the thing would work. She was beginning to think it might.

"The bait needs to be something else, something that a troll can't resist no matter the risk." Hiccup explained handing the sock back to Astrid.

"And what would that be?" Astrid asked.

"An easy target." Hiccup answered.

****Snotlout****

Snotlout groaned as he came to. He was breathing. That was a good sign he thought to himself after taking in a few deep breaths. His eyes didn't work, but then he realized that it was the middle of the night, and he could see the shadows in the bedroom just fine.

Was that all some messed up nightmare, he wondered, the thing with being attacked by Hiccup's evil doppelganger. It had to be. He thought to himself and turned over in his bed, trying to get comfortable and go back to sleep. And then he turned over again. The bed felt wrong. It was just wooden planks. His soft and fluffy feather mattress was gone. He then realized he wasn't facing the usual direction that he did in his bed. He sat up. He wasn't in his own bed. _Weird._

"Will you stop squirming around and go back to sleep? I'm tired!" A voice called from across the room. _But why?_

"Tuff?"

"Yeah what do you want?"

"Where are we and how did we get here?" He asked.

"Did that whack across your head dislodge your tiny brain or something? We're in our room."

"_Our_ room?"

"Yeah, the room we shared since we were born. Mom dragged you back here after she found you passed out on the chief's doorstep. Now go back to sleep!"

Passed out on the chief's doorstep. Our room. Our. Room. A common 'Mom' who dragged him back to Our Room, the room that he also shared with Tuffnut since they were born.

Snotlout lifted both hands and pressed them against his chest. And then he screamed.

End
file.